

# The Piedmont Project in Education

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*In its second year of a five-year program, the Piedmont Project in individualizing instruction and attaining a high quality of education is progressing on or ahead of schedule.*

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**T**HE School District of Greenville County, South Carolina, is philosophically and in practice committed to individualizing and personalizing education for all the students within the district.

In seeking to implement this commitment, numerous changes have been made in the educational programs of the county schools. For the most part, these changes, on a pilot basis, have affected individual classrooms or single schools. In a school district serving 58,000 students through 96 schools, effecting meaningful change can prove to be a never-ending process.

## The Experimental Schools Program

The desire to speed up the change process attracted the attention of the district to the Experimental Schools Program, U.S. Office of Education (since transferred to the

National Institute of Education). The Experimental Schools Program was introduced by President Nixon in his Message on Educational Reform (March 1970) when he called for a program to be a "bridge between basic educational research and actual school practices." Proposals by local educational agencies designed to effect comprehensive (K-12) educational change in current practices were requested on a national basis in December 1970 and again in March 1971.

The School District of Greenville County was one of over 300 educational agencies responding in the second round of competition.<sup>1</sup> A proposal for a comprehensive project, unique to the needs of Greenville County and representing significant alterna-

<sup>1</sup>For a detailed discussion of this program see: *Experimental Schools Program 1971*. Catalog No. HE 5.220:20194. Washington, D.C.: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972.

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tives to existing school organization, practice, and traditional performance was submitted.

The Greenville District's proposal, the Piedmont Schools Project, was funded in March 1972. Now beginning its second year of operation, the five year, 6.2 million dollar venture is one of seven major projects in the United States funded by the Experimental Schools Program. The Project is centered in the six elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school serving the Greer area of Greenville County. The ideas contained in the Piedmont Project were tailored by the staff of the district in response to educational concerns expressed by the Greer citizens.



Students in the Piedmont Schools Project are grouped in each subject according to their level of achievement.

### Citizens Set Goals

Intensive involvement by the Greer community, which began during the planning phase of the Project, continues at an increasing rate. An example of the community

support for the school program was the City Council proclamation declaring September 17, 1973, as Piedmont Schools Project Day. Citizen groups, called Educational Cooperatives and designed to represent every sector of the community, identified 11 goals which they value for their schools. These goals have been the guiding principles for the Greer schools as programs and organizational patterns have been developed. They were stated as follows:

1. Help each student to know himself, his capabilities, his limitations, and his own worth
2. Help each student to develop a value system that recognizes and appreciates the contributions of others to his life
3. Provide him with the basic skills of communication (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), and with the basic mathematical skills needed to function in everyday living
4. Provide him with the opportunity to learn a marketable skill, or with the resources to enter a post high school educational institution
5. Help him to understand and appre-

<b>Traditional Schools</b>	<b>Piedmont Schools</b>
Teacher-centered schools	Learner-centered schools
Teachers work with students	Teachers, paraprofessionals, and students work with students
Class-oriented teaching	Individualized teaching
Single-aged grouping	Multi-aged grouping
Failure oriented	Success oriented
Purpose of education defined by professionals	Purpose of education defined by community
Learning confined to classroom	Out-of-school learning stressed
Administrative decision making	Participation in decision making
Self-contained classes	Team teaching, buildings modified to open space

ciate his freedom and its limitations; help him develop the self-discipline necessary for survival

6. Help each student to accept his responsibilities to himself, his employer, and his fellow man

7. Expose him to a broad variety of experiences that will enable him to see the possibilities of human life

8. Motivate him to use all of his senses in an awareness of the beauty, order, wonder, and delicate balance of his physical world

9. Encourage his creativity: in the arts, in his thinking, in making a good life for himself through expressions of his own individuality, and in acceptance of similar expressions of others

10. Help him to recognize that "education" is a continuing thing, and to provide him continuing opportunities to learn and to participate with others in the learning process

11. Stimulate the imagination of the

student in order that he may meet the challenges of the future.

We believe that a school system structured from the desires, goals, and resources of the community and based on the belief that each student has potential for learning, and that a flexible, responsive school organization will make it possible to offer viable alternatives to all youth, can be expected to produce considerable change in the formal program of education.

### What Are the Goals?

A unique and appealing aspect of the Experimental Schools Program is that it allows funding for five full years in order to achieve meaningful and lasting change. It is, therefore, much too early to attempt to evaluate efforts made in the Piedmont Project. Some of the specific characteristics which are being sought in these schools as compared with our more traditional schools are listed on p. 614.

Photos courtesy of the authors



A student competent in a particular subject may be able to relate to a peer more effectively than a professional teacher can.

## What Activities Are Needed?

Specific activities have been designed to implement programs which will promote these characteristics. Some of these are listed here:

- Many commercially prepared instructional programs designed to be implemented in an individualized manner have been employed.

- A substantial investment has been made in in-service training designed cooperatively by teachers and staff to meet specific needs.

- Organizational patterns designed to promote flexible instructional modes have been employed.

- Every elementary child receives instruction from specially trained paraprofessionals in music, art, and physical education.

- Resource coordinators are employed to aid teachers and administrators in decision making involving program matters.

- A continuing program in organiza-

tion development has been employed to aid staff at all levels in perfecting new roles and interpersonal relationships.

- Public relations programs have been intensified in an effort to keep the community in close harmony with the schools.

- Teachers serve as advisors to students.

- Nine-week short courses are utilized in the high school.

The Piedmont Project is entering the second year of a five year change effort. Change has been rapid in some areas—slow in others. Teacher enthusiasm is high, with teachers reporting that children are happier and are learning more. Few people want to return to the traditional methods even though more effort is required to implement the new processes.

Thus far, indications are that efforts in the Piedmont Project to individualize instruction and to attain a high quality of education according to community standards are progressing on or ahead of schedule. The Piedmont Schools Project continues to "seek a better way in education." □



Learning is tailored to fit each student, with various learning activities going on simultaneously in different areas of the "learning community."

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